

J. C. Jones S.D. D 310

The Inward Life

FROM THE LETTERS OF
MOTHER STUART

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

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THE INWARD LIFE

Extracts from the Letters of
MOTHER STUART

(Compiled by Mother Maud Monahan)



LONDON

CATHOLIC TRUTH SOCIETY

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Mother Stuart was born on November 11th, 1857, in the Anglican Rectory at Cottesmore. As a child of thirteen she set out on a solitary search for Truth, having been roused to this great venture by a casual remark of one of her brothers, that Aristotle held that every rational creature must have a last end. The search occupied several years and landed her in the Catholic Church at the age of twenty-one. Three and a half years later she entered the Society of the Sacred Heart at Roehampton, where she was to spend the greater part of her religious life. Named Mistress of Novices immediately after her profession, she became Superior Vicar in 1894. She held this post for seventeen years ; years in which peace was her gift to all who came near her. Having acquired to perfection the art of managing her own soul and of living from moment to moment on the Will of God, she directed all her energies to helping others to do likewise. A born ruler and educator, she was at the same time an ideal

friend, as the letters here reproduced bear witness. In 1911, on the death of Reverend Mother Digby, she was elected Superior General of the Society of the Sacred Heart, and left Roehampton to take up her residence in the Mother house in Brussels. The last three years of her life were spent in visiting the Convents of her Order in all parts of the world. The close of her long journeys coincided with the outbreak of the Great War. Leaving Brussels, where she could no longer keep in touch with her convents, she returned to Roehampton. But her life's work was finished and she died on October 21st, 1914.

The greater number of the letters in this little book are now printed for the first time. Some of them have already appeared in part, or wholly in *The Life and Letters of Janet E. Stuart*, published by Messrs. Longmans Green & Co., by whose kind permission they are here reproduced. It will be seen that they are addressed to a great variety of people—people in different states of life and at different stages in their spiritual ascensions.

ROEHAMPTON, *January 18th, 1933.*

THE INWARD LIFE

Right Thoughts of God

You have not right thoughts of God yet. Don't you know that of course what He does is the *rightest* and most glorious and splendid thing that can be? It must be so, even if it were far more incomprehensible than it is. . . .

The only possible contentment for our souls is in God, and remember that to doubt or kick or repine or judge hardly of God is to go back to the old fetish-worship which you have given up. A God who could be anything but incomparably sweet and loving is not *our own God*, but a terror dressed up in our morbid minds. Think the best and sweetest thoughts and believe them, but you can never reach half of what He is. . . .

You cannot think how I wish that you could manage to let go of those "old, unhappy, far-off thoughts" of God, and really believe Him to be what you know He must be and could not help being, the whole

sweetness of life, the whole power and love of the world, and that you would give yourself into His hands by an "incomparable act of resignation," sure, so sure, that nothing you could dream of can come near to what He is planning for you, and wants to give you if you will only let Him.

He wants to take you sailing out into the glory of His thoughts and love, and through sheer fright you cling to the rope and the steps of the bathing machine. Father Nieremberg would say "Go to," and I say "Let go," and so does God.

If you keep your heart steady at its centre, loving and choosing God's Will whatever it may be, and then in the little details of life that are counted by the thousands, set your own will aside, and try to do it as if you liked it, that will be a great victory, and a perfect preparation for anything that God may have in store for you later on. Don't be surprised if you find that you want the highest and best and then go down before the tiny temptations ; it is not surprising. Our Lord knows the brittle stuff we are made of, and is not surprised or disappointed in us if we break down time after time. The only thing

that would disappoint Him, I think, is if we trusted Him less, or thought He was weary of us because of our faults; and that disappointment, I hope, you will never give Him.

Your letter made me feel very much for you and pray that God may guide and strengthen you and not let any failure come between you and your trust in Him. Do not judge Him by any human standard and keep away, as if He "could not bear the sight of you," as people say.

"For the love of God is broader than the limits
of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonder-
fully kind."

We cannot exaggerate the faithfulness and forbearing nature of His friendship, and I do not think He likes us to stand aloof and look askance at Him, as if we did not know what ground we stood upon with Him. Other people's trust breaks down if we have disappointed them. His never does. He knows the brittle clay of which He has made us and makes unending allowances. But all this may be beside the mark of your thought, the

only thing that is sure to be practical is—trust Him utterly, and seek light and strength in Communion.

I have torn off a bit from your letter and send it back to you. It is *the thing* I have been so long wanting you to see, and I am so glad that you have seen it. Do hold on to this. We believe in God so utterly that all that could be said and “proved to the hilt” against Him, against our high and loving conception of Him, would find us quite unconcerned and indifferent. Think your best thoughts of Him and they will ever fall short of His Fatherhood and love; and the sum of our words must be “He is All.” And for the rest follow the authoritative voice within, without asking it to disclose too much the secret of the *voice-production*. God teaches thus, no matter what we call it, and it makes for what is best.

If Our Lord said a word to you it would be “O thou of little faith why didst thou doubt!” * How could He be displeased with anyone who wants, even a very little, to please Him. And you want to, very much

* St. Matt. xiv. 31.

indeed. But it must be a little disappointing not to be able to convince you, as you would find it disappointing if you could not convince an infant that you thought kindly of it !

You hypnotize yourself by saying over such things in your mind as " perhaps it is all a punishment," just as children scare themselves by saying : " perhaps there is a ghost on the nursery stairs." They get to believe it. Suggest the contrary to yourself and don't admit the bogey into words. God loves you and is full of interest and approval of your efforts, only not of the doubtful thoughts of Himself. You must " think of God in goodness." * May He bless you.

Allons, mon âme, relève un peu la tête pour regarder le ciel et pour prier. Père de Ravignan said that, and " All Saints " says it again to you, though this will not reach you in time. Don't disappoint Our Lord by distrusting Him, as you would be disappointed by a little child who had not confidence in your good will towards it. Yet you are not so tender or so strong, or so magnificent as He, and you did not make the little creature and surround it with your love as

* Wisdom i, 1.

He has done. Try to understand Him. He will be so pleased.

Thank you for all letters, extracts, pleasant signs of life pleasant aspirations after the life to come. Should one call these pleasant? Yes, why not? God is the pleasantness of our life in time as well as in eternity. He is everything to us, isn't He? Love Him and trust Him as much as you can, for so many disappoint Him and He loves to be loved, so as to be able to give the more.

Faith not Sight

We are to walk by faith not by sight. The *realization* that you wish for so much is not necessary for us, nor would it be good, or it would be granted. Conscious communion with God is reserved for Heaven, and snatches of it come to help us here. But we can walk without it—"stepping fearless through the night." And do not look for a magic word, a magic hour or thought which will change all this; it cannot be, and it need not be. The law of our life is struggle and often struggle in the dark, but God is always near you, and I think you would be surprised to see His joy in the efforts that seem to you

so poor. So all I can say is "patience." "Set thyself to seek not for much peace but for much patience" so says the *Imitation*, and the writer knew. And be not weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we do not faint.

Your good sense has come to the rescue in a difficult moment ; thank God for it, and as the screws said to the rivets when the "Dimbula" was creaking and straining in a gale, "in case of doubt, hold on." The time will pass and with it all the difficulty that depends upon the body, and *that* you may be sure (as I am) is the principal part, probably nearly all. The rest is the usual share of fighting that belongs to the Church militant while "seeking that which is to come." * There must be pain and darkness and unsearchable mysteries and insoluble problems, but there again, "in case of doubt hold on." Wait for God to explain Himself in Eternity. It would be childish to think that we could understand in time, but never let go of the belief that He is the All-Good.

Yes, times are bad, but God is good ; let us hold on to that, and let other things work

* Cf. Hebrews xiii. 14.

on as He knows, towards the solution that we do not know, which as you say is always unexpected, but His own. . . .

I was not at all surprised on receiving your second letter, though I should have been unspeakably delighted if you had received a sensible grace. You will think me incorrigibly hopeful, but I cannot say that I feel discouraged, though full of the deepest sympathy for all you are going through. I believe in your faith, although it is hidden away underground, as entirely hidden as the bracken-roots in winter and as full of life. I think you are making two mistakes, one is looking for realization and finality—a spiritual barometer that will not vary—in reality for sense, to which realization belongs ; secondly, you are not perfect in patience ! It is impossible for God not to hear your prayer, to hear every prayer of His creature, but, being God, He must hear it in His own way, and not in the way of His creature ; but let us go no further than that, “Thou shalt call and I will answer Thee, to the work of Thy hands, Thou wilt stretch out Thy right hand,” * and waiting His call you will pray. But don’t analyse,

* Job xiv. 15.

analysis is a process too coarse for anything so subtle and delicate as our inmost consciousness of God. Only pray and in its own time all will be well. You cannot make shipwreck if you continue to pray. . . . Pray humbly, "God is in Heaven and thou art on earth, therefore let thy words be few." * Don't let us forget that we are all blind grubs at present, "it does not yet appear what we shall be." †

I hope that it has been or is, *bene, benissimo* for your retreat, and that you see all that one can expect to see, the next step of the way. Isn't it a discipline of our life's impatience when we are longing to know the issue of all things and the last word of God's plan? It must be best so, because so He arranges it, and of course it is.

The very point of everything is that it should be dark to our human vision; otherwise where would be the faith, the hope and the glory of it all? It is just because we cannot see that we can trust so happily.

I do not like you to admit such a thing as

* Ecclesiastes v. 1.

† 1 St. John iii. 2.

a puzzle about God, because everything about Him must be *of course* to us. It is equally *of course* that we should not understand. That is part of the worship. It is faith to *know* without understanding, and real love to love what we do not understand, because it is love and faith and hope together. "All shall be well." Even to natural reason it seems so luminous that in the domain of our probation for heaven, suffering should be good and precious and lovely. I wish you would believe those "fleeting lights" which tell you that you could be a saint! It means an "incomparable act of resignation" here, now, to things as they are, for the love of God, and whenever you think of it again. It is a fundamental thing built on a rock, not on a pious practice.

So often you are in a kicking, doubting, panic-stricken attitude, as if God were not God, and did not with tenderest providence direct each detail of life for the best. Don't you believe this? Go on making acts of faith and absolute submission until you do, "a self-surrender absolute" which will carry you beyond all doubts as to circumstances, or wishes that they should be otherwise than

just as they are. God knows and loves. We cannot understand. If we could understand, all the best beauty of our life would wither away. It is glorious in its faith and hope and adherence to what we don't understand. May Our Lord give you light on this, and love for the adventurous journey of faith and hope with Him in the dark.

Tribulations of a Pilgrim

I wish you the tribulations of a pilgrim, but also the joys and hopes, and finally the reward and rest of the pilgrim, when the light of faith goes out because the shrine is reached, and faith and hope are changed into vision and fruition.

Yes, I understand the struggle of it all, but you must remember that God's training is always done thus "just where it hurts most" as Father Morris would say; and if you lay down the price of your resentful thoughts and the will that struggles for a free hand, God will bless your work and use you for His instrument of grace. Only at this price can it be. It has always been so. And when all rises up inside, think how God

Incarnate allowed Himself to be taught by Saint Joseph at Nazareth, step by step, the use of carpenter's tools.

Yes, there is nothing for it, my soul, but to humble thyself, to go prostrate in the dust before God and then thou canst rise up and go on in the holy way of faith. It is quite true, you must *grow* up and see things in their true perspective, and understand that *all* these treasures of God's wisdom and love are in vessels of clay, and at the same time you must not stop at that part of it; reason takes you so far, and the highest manhood, but you must go even further, to what faith says, and that opens the great horizons of eternity. God knows, God guides, and out of all our puzzles and failures and efforts He brings good, and that good is eternal. . . .

You must not for a moment think that God who has given you the light and the desire and the understanding would or could leave you in the lurch half way, without the strength and the grace to carry it through. His own honour would forbid it! if nothing else. The thing you must be prepared for is that it must be warfare, and not a victorious

march, and the thing that you must accept is the condition of all Christian warfare, that we have to be always *becoming* what we aim at, and never can say that we get there. But that is of the essence of things. You understand it. . . .

I tell you with all my heart and conviction that peace and joy will return some day. You are fighting bravely and God's help will not fail you. My poor, dearest child, no words can say how I feel with you all that you are battling through, and especially this last part, loneliness and darkness and pain, but, take it on faith . . . this will, please God, give the lift to what lies beyond, the region in which God is all, which dwarfs everything else down to its true proportion, and *here* or *there*, this or that, means nothing compared to the true life in God's Will. You fought a brave fight before, do you remember how you felt you could not conquer . . . and yet you did, so you will now. It is you, with God's help who have to do it, and who can do it. . . . I think God's nearness felt will come again, but if not, you know that every soul that God loves much, must, some time or another, wander through its Dark Night,

without being Saint John of the Cross. God is with you, He is near you, when you fight He is proud of you and ready to help you to do the impossible. You must be brave and let Him tempt you out to walk on the water, and in your heart you must sing because you belong to God, so nothing bad can ever happen to you.

No, my dear child, don't think I am disappointed in your—what shall I call it—new stage of spiritual life. I am not a bit, for I never expected what you seem to think would make the present stage a disappointment. The externals of things, failure, success, scope, influence, acceptability, all these things say very little to me, and I think mean very little to God either. It is the inner tendency of each individual soul to Him, in the old phrase "the heart right with God" which alone matters and chiefly interests me. And God, through all failure, weariness and disappointment with ourselves, is working out His harmonies for the future. We can only shut our eyes and do what lies in us and trust Him. *Domineus regit me.**

May He bless you always.

* The Lord ruleth me.—Psalm xxii. 1.

You have seen that you have been giving in to nerves and that was what made everything look small, and rather wretched, and people seemed to grow too mortally human! . . . Now you must get up like Samson, and live your life straight towards its end. Look at God, think of God, your own God and Father, and everything will get straight and calm down. . . . Do all that your will can do, and we can do a great deal by *determining* to be self-possessed and calm. That, often without any treatment, makes one well, for the body is so dependent on the mind, and the mind on the spiritual life. So it comes back to steadying oneself on the view of the last end, and God's wonderful love for us.

It does not seem to me so bad as it does to you because I quite expected it. . . . In the leisure of retreat things are much simpler than in the stress of active life, and our best self emerges and has some play. There are winters and summers, it cannot be all the year round the same, there would be no fruit if it were so. You must be patient with the seasons and do the little you can do. This you are doing. "We cannot kindle when we will, the fire that in the heart abides." If

you were in retreat again, or ill and dying, all the faith, hope, and charity that seem to be dead would prove that they had only been dormant—not dead, but only “spacheless,” like the Irishman in the well. You will see it will come right, only don’t compare your state of mind with that of others, it never helps. You must go the way that suits you, and they must go the way that suits them. There are many mansions in Our Father’s house, and He never asks the impossible of us.

Christina Rossetti says truly that the road winds uphill all the way, yes, to the very end. I am more and more convinced that life is meant to be burdensome and toilsome and extraordinarily like travelling with an ox waggon in South Africa at the rate of about two miles a day; sometimes the waggon turns clean over, often it sticks fast in a drift, sometimes they have even to take it to pieces in the mud of the drift, and reconstruct it on the further shore. So I am more doubtful about things that go smoothly than when they are troublesome from morning to night. Never mind, the arrival will be worth it all, and it is not so far now—

to see Our Lord's overflowing gladness of welcome as each poor, battered, heart-sick child comes home for the everlasting home-coming, and to see all that He thought of the struggles and troubles and accidents of the way. In moments when one can realize this, one understands that nothing else matters, except that we should keep our eyes on Him, and try to be submissive and patient for love of Him. It is all worth while, that is the thing to bear in mind. . . . All Heaven will flow over with delight to see you home at last. . . .

. . . You spent a very fervent Lent and I thank Our Lord for it, because although that sensible fervour cannot last (God does not mean it to) yet for the time it lifts one up above the fogs and clouds of everyday life and shows us something of the hidden world of grace. We shall know all about it some day. Then afterwards one falls rather flat upon the cobble-stones of daily life! Never mind, it is there that our training goes on, puzzling out problems of life and doing the bits of good that come our way. If you do them for God there will never be either failure or disappointment in them, for even if they

come to nothing, it was all for Him and He never forgets.

Yes, you *can* do it, and if you do it for God, with the thought of eternity before you, you *will* get through. . . . You are like a person rolling a big stone up a hill ; you could let go, and it would roll down to the bottom again, you *can* hold on and you are nearing the top, so I hope and trust and pray and think that you *can't* let go. Never mind how you came to be where you are, even *supposing* it were naturally a mistake, it is God's will for you here and now and consequently martyrdom would not be a greater proof of love, and you must love God and do His will ; nothing else is worth living for, and you have a chance of growing up in virtue and dependence on God which you never had before.

Sanctity

God's work is not showy, and it is never done suddenly ; wait and pray and be patient and remember *the thing* God cares about is that you should be a saint. Your feet are on the right road, now hold on to Him and with many a " slip up " and many a moment

of distress you will, all the same, go manfully heavenward. It will be all right some day, and every day of effort is blessed. May God bless you always.

To end with the most interesting thing of all. Yes, do be a saint; why not? What else is worth living for, caring about; and every little thing in the day may help you on towards it, if you will look at it on the right side as coming to you from our dearest God, who is so *in* with us in our daily troubles and duties, for whom nothing is too great or too small, who is so understanding and loving to all our moods and aches and longings, and asks only one thing, that we should take our worries to Him to be comforted, and our joys to be blessed, and our tangles to be pulled out, and our choking gulps of trouble to be quieted down; if you have Him in the details of your life with you, all is well, and you can manage anything; the one thing to avoid is thinking hard and hateful and unworthy thoughts of Him and misunderstanding Him. So love Him and trust Him all you can, and let nothing take you away from the keep of that strong castle, God the refuge of His people.

My dear, you are forgetting again that it is *you* who must supernaturalize your views in order to be at peace in yourself and do God's work as you should. If you look to Sacred History, Church History, and even your own experience, which each year must add to, do you not see that God's work is *never* done in ideal conditions, *never* as we should have imagined or chosen, but that God's own saints, wherever they are, have fixed their eyes upon Him and tried to "work out a perfect will," His, and their own locked in His. You do not know, He knows; you don't understand, He understands; you cannot, He can, and the one thing He cares about is . . . that you should "work out a perfect will" and be a saint, that is what you came for. "Bernard, Bernard, wherefore camest thou hither?"

Desire and Peace

I have been thinking mostly about two essentials in the preparation for Pentecost, one is desire and the other is peace of soul. Desire which seems to carry everything before it, and obviously must do so, because the gift is for us, and God more desirous to give

than we to receive, but desire makes us greater and more capable of receiving ; “ the lack of desire is the ill of all ills,” says Father Faber in lines which I like very much : “ But the balsam, the wine of predestinate wills is a jubilant pining and longing for God,” at present for God the Holy Ghost.

And the other condition is peace, *not* peace in one's possessions, *not* peace in one's circumstances, from the absence of trouble, but peace from the permanent, willed, unfelt, steady surrender to God at all times, the peace of Saint Francis de Sales's “ incomparable act of resignation ” which includes so much ; and other nice kinds of peace too ; the peace of a penitent spirit, very low in its own eyes and therefore not unsettled, and the peace of a silent soul which does not chatter to itself, to others or to God ; the peace of a real sincerity with all these three, and many other varieties of this beautiful, unworldly thing, which are probably familiar to you. Anyhow I wish you *all*, as much as can be had, as much as each one can contain, and the capacity for more. . . .

God hears our unuttered desires and as they are satisfied they grow. . . . The more

we desire and attain the more we shall desire, and the more attain. . . . That is why our life is so *immense*.

Will of God. Abandonment

As far as we are concerned, God means things to be just as they are, what does happen and what does not happen. So never wish them otherwise by a hair's breadth. All our raw material for sanctity is in the *now* just as it is, and if it had not the two elements, the one that we do not understand, and the one that we should not choose, it would not be what it is to us. I hope that for Christmastide you will pasture on the great thoughts that help you. Why should you take anything less satisfying?

There is one fortress which need never be rushed by temptation, and that is too obvious to say: God knows best, God does all for the best. It could not be otherwise, wait and see. It would be impossible that we should understand now, it is equally impossible not to believe "that all shall be well and thou shalt see it thyself that all manner of things shall be well." Is your devotion to Our Lady

a help? Do you go to her in every trouble and ask her to see it through? If not, please begin *now*.

Please establish firmly in your mind, that to abandon yourself to the providence of God and the love of the Sacred Heart is no myth or illusion, but the humblest, truest, most worshipful stand that your soul can make against every temptation, difficulty, or danger. If you let go of all else, and *drop*, you will find God's love and strength circling you round, and sooner or later a great calm, in what Saint Catherine of Siena so beautifully calls "the Sea Pacific" of the Divinity. Where could God's creature be better or more at home! Nothing matters except that. . . . But you must give up your own self-will in little things and great. If you get your way, you get a hideous little idol to nurse; if you give it up, you have God. God loving you, bearing you up, and taking the responsibility Himself of all that happens to you.

What does it matter to us *who* or *how* or *what* in connection with the ordering of our life? It is always God and God's way and God's Will, and the less there is for self-love,

the more there is for love, and for faith, and for all the heavenly things which alone are worth living for.

It is a mistake to think that there is less of God's Will when you are happy ! " O my God, Your Will is very sweet to me to-day, but it is Your Will that I want."

You must live by the Will of God ; it must be both light and strength to you, and if you are faithful, without letting yourself be anxious, but *quietly* faithful to the inward call of God's grace, you will find the yoke sweet and the burden light. . . . Do not give up any high aspirations, aim at the very highest and best, but understanding that to get there is a life's work, not the work of a day, so never let failure cast down or disappoint you, but always begin again with great courage, and especially great confidence. Our Lord will always help you and be pleased with your efforts.

You are right about the surrender. It was at first many definite and strenuous acts of resignation, now it is rather like a running home to God, " the hiding-place of His vexed creatures," as Father Faber beautifully calls

Him. . . . Go on trustfully, there is nothing to make you afraid.

We have to prepare for the future, and yet we do not know what it will bring. We have to find a standing ground so firm that nothing unexpected can disturb us, and so broad that it will carry any undertaking that we may have to base upon it, and so satisfying that it will take the place of all other satisfactions. There is only one thing that answers to this and to every other need of our souls, and that is the Will of God.

Joy comes of utter contentedness with God's Will for us now, with the thought of Heaven full in sight.

To attain to Truth

I know of only one way of attaining to truth, prayer and submission of mind and heart to God. You believe in God. A creature's belief in God includes an act of submission as profound as its deepest thought can reach, and that act of adoration includes much more than we are at all times able to perceive.

I should like to think that you prayed

every day for light to know God's truth. *Emitte lucem tuam et veritatem tuam*, for I feel so sure of the end of the verse, *ipsa me deduxerunt et adduxerunt in montem sanctum tuum et in tabernacula tua*.* As to personal sorrow, I will be very frank with you, the deep personal sorrow to me, for I have a very special affection for you . . . is that your mind should be as it is, so obscured and overclouded in all those things that are to me the light of light and life of life. . . . That is my innermost thought about you, and when I pray for you it is for that, and that has always been my regret for you ; in proportion to that, all other matters seem to me but as details. . . .

. . . There is one thing above all to hold on to, the attitude of submission of mind to God's truth, known or unknown. The submission is to Him, and this submission of mind is the thing to pray for, as in no other way can light come, and at all events it is a permanent right attitude of will. Do not analyse too much as to what you assent or

* Send forth thy light and thy truth : they have conducted me and brought me unto thy holy hill and into thy tabernacles.—Psalm xlii. 3.

how. Leave it to clear itself, or not to clear itself, as God wills.

You have allowed yourself to slip your cables again and drift about in past and especially future waters, and in those inward self-analyses that go round and round and lead to nothing but "confusion of spirit" as Saint Catherine of Siena would call it, and depression of spirit. My views have not changed. Judging you to the best of my powers I think your troubles are more of the nature of intellectual scruples than anything else, and a desire to feel certain beyond what is given to man to feel certain, and to formulate and to express to yourself things which do not come within the compass of human reason. I think the remedies are prayer and humility. To cultivate an attitude of submission to God, and humbly beg His guidance. . . .

You cannot see ahead. But you can always pray and try to be humble, for only then is light. If we shut our minds against humility and contrition, darkness thickens in the intellect. One sees by becoming lowly, and in "God's light sees light." *

* Cf. Psalm xxxv. 10.

Courage and Trust

After all nothing matters except that you should be united with Him in loving trust, and conformity of will. He *can* only do what is best for every one of us. So we will trust Him in everything, from the greatest to the least.

How glad I am that you have now the real light about God being pleased with us, for it is most important to believe it. It makes such a difference to our courage. Saint Francis of Sales puts it nicely when he says : " God is content with little, for He well knows that we have not much."

You know your life is all right, you know it *now*, don't you ? And you trust God utterly and don't mind things being weird and unaccountable, do you ? Because you know that He knows all about it, and will make it all right in the end. All crooked things will go right, and the word will come into the riddle, and the key into the puzzle, and we shall be so delighted to think that it was right all along and that we trusted Him when things were darkest and most incomprehensible.

You cannot think how much our soul depends on what we say to it in our thoughts. Try always to say hopeful and encouraging things, for it is a great and true principle that at the bottom of every discouraging thought there is an untruth and at the bottom of every helpful thought of God and of our soul there is a truth. We must hold to hope and tell ourselves: "My soul, with God's help, we shall do this and that. We may fall often into daily faults, but in the end all will be well and we shall be with God . . ." and this is true.

"If one only knew that one would come out safe the other side." Yes, I know, but that can't be when one is trying for such high things as we are. The higher we want to fly the greater the risk, but that is the glorious part of it. The great uncertainties in which we trust God, the breathless risks we run, with no assurance but our great trust in Him, that seems to me to be of the essence of our life and its beauty. This will grow upon you, you will get your balance in the risk and get to love it.

Be full of confidence; God loves you so much in spite of all. Miseries and tempta-

tions, against which you are struggling, do not in any way separate you from Him. Fly to the foot of the Cross and the Wounds of Our Lord, and let nothing persuade you you are not dear and near to Him. Humble yourself in little ways as the occasion comes, but peacefully; not driving yourself at "an act," but living low down, and delight in serving others in a hidden way.

You are right in thinking more prayer is what you need. You might have added "and a great deal more confidence." If you could only know how God loves you! There could be an end of so many painful worries, for you would roll them all up and trust them all to Our Lord's loving patience and tenderness.

What Our Lord holds to is peace and confidence in Him. If you keep hold of confidence nothing will ever disturb your peace, because any mistake or failure, and these are inevitable for us all (and even great faults if there are any) only become more reasons for leaning upon Our Lord and a fresh claim to His loving indulgence. The less you feel you can do yourself the more you must count upon Him.

It is the want of courage that is the undoing of you, and so long as you look within for it, you will never find it. You do not know yet how to find everything in Our Lord, but you must learn, for there alone can it be found. Light to see your faults, and grace to overcome them little by little and to be joyous always in Him, He must give you. You have Him, what can be wanting to you ?

Courage, mon âme, now is the time to say to yourself ; “ I will go by what I have seen in calmer moments, with my eyes open ; I will take the risk, I will make the act of blind trust ” ; and let your prayer be very simple and not analytic. “ O Lord, Thou knowest ” is often enough.

Prayer

Your retreat news was all that I could wish, and I think the dispositions of soul in which you began it were the very best : more sure than ever that you deserved nothing, and still more convinced beyond doubt that He would give you all. He *likes that*, I know it on the best authority.

You need not and must not get into such a whirl that your prayer passes without your being able to recollect yourself. The moment of pause, which you ought to make before entering the chapel, when you are hurried, the quiet entrance, very careful genuflection, and the summoning of all your faculties into the presence of God, by an act of deepest adoration, would give you the upper hand of the "whirl" to a considerable extent, and then there is so much in a good start.

A person who is very much occupied and inclined to be "rushed" tells me that Our Lord seems to say constantly to her soul: "You must pray without time, since you cannot have time to pray." It rather appeals to me as a key to the possibilities for the "young and rushed." I recommend it to your consideration.

You have made one very useful experience and it will be of value to you for life, that is, that it is not circumstances but desire that makes the interior man. One may progress in prayer just as much in the high pressure of full work as in the low pressure of less absorbing duties, for if they are allowed to, they expand like gas and tend to fill all the

space available. Solitude and external peace do not then make a soul of prayer, but a great desire of God. . . . It always comes back to what Our Lord said to the young man : " If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, give to the poor and follow me."* It cannot be had for less than that.

I think your question is almost over the border of what we *may* ask, for the answer is so evidently : " Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will " with my own ?† And the extraordinary graces that are given to the saints, are given out of the depths of God's foreknowledge and choice ; as Father Segneri says : " May He not be equally glorified and satisfied in the elephant and in the sardine ? "

But if we use the wonderful graces which we have, no one can imagine how far God will take us ; and what He looks for is our response to *our own grace*. Don't wish for *more or other grace* : *il faudrait être fou pour vouloir autre chose que la volonté de Dieu.*‡

* St. Matt. xix. 21.

† St. Matt. xx. 15.

‡ It would be folly to desire anything except the Will of God.

May He always bless and help and love you every day.

You are quite on the right track, it is the gift of your heart that God wants above all in prayer, that you may both give to Him and receive Him. Keep it always uplifted with great expectations. "Expect, expect again," * God loves us to expect from Him, because He loves to give Himself to us. If we only believed this, as we profess it, how close our union would become and how blessed our work would be.

"Give us Thyself" is the best prayer we can pray, and "we give ourselves to Thee" no better offering. For we do not know what to ask and what to offer. Leave it to Him, but remember that we must, and we mean to give all for all.

In prayer it is often the very best just to leave yourself face to face with God without saying anything.

Try to make your intercourse with Our Lord as informal and natural as you can. Remember that He looks, and cares and

* Isaias xxviii. 10-13.

takes interest in and enters into every joy or sorrow or duty of your day. Try to look trustfully up to Him in every difficulty. . . .

About meditation, try to make it as simply as possible, and see whether it does not succeed better to turn it *all* into what Saint Ignatius calls colloquy. I mean, to make even the reflections as a direct address to Our Lord. It is rather more easy in that way to avoid distractions. At this time of year (Christmas) you would find it very helpful, I think, to take Saint Bernard's hymn *Jesu dulcis memoria*, say, two verses every day, and to expand each line or thought or word as a direct address to Our Lord, as petition, love, praise, desire, thanksgiving, etc., according to the tone of the verse. It is worth trying. . . .

I am so glad the Marie Réparatrice Convent is a comfort to you. To find the Blessed Sacrament exposed, to know that It is always there is such a comfort and grace. You can go there and in a few moments steep your soul in the very Truth and Light and Life of the world, without words or even very definite thoughts, but in the consciousness

that you are in the presence of God and that a real human heart thrills with pleasure and welcome to you as you come in. . . .

Contrition always, *hope* always, prayer *as you can*, in the way that is easiest at the moment. Be very flexible, don't want to have it this way or that way, but tend to what is simple and quiet, and persevere in hard times. One moment of realization is worth days and weeks of waiting.

Whatever happens, my dear child must keep the ideal up, and not be daunted by any failure to get there. You cannot expect to reach it at once, but if you keep on hoping, praying and trying you will get there in the end, but you will never know it. Nurse the spirit of prayer, all good comes from that, and it needs care to grow. Try to read a little of something spiritual every day, even if only for five minutes. It helps to keep the mind on heavenly things, and remember that all passes away except these heavenly things. Troubles pass, and fighting passes, and weariness and temptation, all except God and the life we live in Him. Pray then, and hold on, and may God and Our Lady be with you.

Don't make the mistake which many make of thinking that intimate union with God in prayer comes as a gift to those that are worthy of it. "The Spirit breatheth where He will." * Perhaps He gives it, not because you are worthy, but to make you so. Anyhow, persist in prayer in spite of all disinclination, not violently, but patiently and silently and even dumbly. Don't seek to be contented with your efforts or to be assured within that all is well, balance yourself on the tremulous outer edge of hope, over the abyss, trembling sometimes but self-surrendered to God's loving care.

For your meditation, now that the Christmas feasts are over, I should advise you to try—and you will tell me how it answers—*The Discourse of Our Lord after the Last Supper*, prepared only from the text itself (that means of course very careful preparation), and especially I would ask you to make these meditations in a prayerful and positive spirit. Not taking up with every fine-spun web of reasoning or difficulty that presents itself, but making it a study of Our

* St. John iii. 8.

Lord's love, with very earnest prayer for insight and understanding of it.

As to the "finding God," you look too much to feeling as an indication of it, I think. God is in no way pledged to let you *feel* that He fills the void which you try to make. Try to do His Will . . . trust Him for the "finding."

Life a Solitude

Yes, my dear child, life is a solitude, and yet as Our Lord Himself said "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me," * though perhaps 364 days out of the year we cannot feel it. But you know that beyond your own erratic guidance and the plunging of the chariot, a hand has guided your life and kept you safe through many a storm, beyond what you could do for yourself, and that same guidance will bring you into port at last.

To our Master we stand or fall, and He sees to the depths of our being. It is good to live in His presence, ashamed but not afraid. That solitariness is what you meant

* St. John xvi. 32.

and chose, though without knowing all it meant, when you said "God was to be the God of your heart and your portion for eternity." * You will not be surprised at it now, for you know what bitter fruit grows from trying to people and plant that solitude. We are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. No *home* for us until heaven, but yet a home by anticipation and faith wherever the Blessed Sacrament is.

Life alone with God does not mean the life of the Miller of Dee. . . . It simply means facing the truth that love consists in giving, not so much in receiving, while we are here. The receiving will be so superabundant even in this life, when we have learnt to give, that we shall feel small and confused at our little gift. It is *more* love for others, not *less* ; *more* feeling for them, and not *less*, that we want, only to find our joy in giving—" *me last.*"

It is for the Master's eye and His pleasure that you must bloom, and eye hath not seen, nor ear heard what He thinks of silent, lonely blooming, and daily efforts to climb, nor what He will say to them when we meet Him.

* Psalm lxxii. 26.

However solitary and lonely the way may seem to you, God is there with you. You want Him. Could He possibly fail or forget? He will send you help or give it to you yourself, always in the moment of need; and the very uncertainty of the supplies is the glory of the thing. You live on trust and hope and love. . . .

. . . In the meantime a little solitude with God must help the thoughts of Eternity and lift you a little above the buzzing and droning of self and its myrmidons, which is so apt to fill our ears in active life, so that we lose the low whisper of God's word within. Ask the Heart of Our Lord, in these days of quietness and silence, to take your heart in hand and make it more His own, the little Tabernacle where He can rest without being disturbed.

Think of our inner life: we are not called to a lonely life, for we are not alone, but we are invited to a most perfect and complete home life within our souls. . . . We are called to work with God, to walk with God, to have influence with God and with all the degrees of crowned heads—saints and angels—who minister around His throne.

Our Lord, our Friend

The resolutions which you have renewed are bulwarks of strength . . . the first keeps your eye on the enemy and your second links you heart to heart with the only Friend whom you can love utterly without danger of disappointment or regret: "Without a friend thou canst not well live; and if Jesus be not thy friend . . ." You know the rest. And He must be with you wherever you go, and you with Him. Each year you will understand better what it means, but it is only in Eternity that you will know what His friendship has been for you, and beyond friendship, His love.

You know who is on your side, God has called you, and you must look to Him and lean on Him, not as a Master but as a Friend, on whom you can pour out all the wealth of love that is in you, and one who will *always* be with you and respond and understand and help, although you will not always see *how*.

. . . My dear child has been going through a lonely valley, rather depressed, and feeling

perhaps as if nothing was any good, and the sun would never shine again in her soul! Yes, I think it was probably a phase, a hard one to go through, but those things teach us, and fasten us to Our Lord. You can always say to Him, "whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee." * Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is your Companion and Counsellor and Friend, enters into it all, has felt it all Himself, been weary as you are and understands you perfectly. Try to talk it out with Him as if you could see His face listening to you, and then wait for His answer. It will not probably come in words, but in peace and confidence, knowing that you are loved and guided and guarded by Him.

... I am delighted that your confessor is firm with you and tells you to go to Holy Communion whatever you think. The grace of Holy Communion is the *fact* itself. God comes, intimately, personally, with all His power and love right down into the centre of our being where the springs of life and

* Psalm lxxii. 25.

thought come up, and when He comes it is with healing and blessing and pacifying power, to put all in order, to make holy and strong and pure what we so often drag down and wear out and misuse, our very soul and substance and faculties. So you see, it is not a case of saying beautiful things to Him, of saying anything at all, but all battered and wearied and dejected as we are, it is only a case of wanting Him and receiving Him, and the work is done without any words at all. That is why I love to hear of your going to Holy Communion. Don't keep aloof. Remember there is no such friend as Our Lord on earth and He wants to be your friend.

Our Lord loves to be understood . . . that is the inward life that is set before us—to try to understand and to sympathize with Him. The counterpart is His understanding and sympathy with us. When no one else understands He does. When no one else is aware, He is ; so that in reality we are never alone. *Se nascens dedit socium** to walk through life with us, walking our pilgrimage, tasting

* He being born gave Himself as our companion.

our bread, drinking of our chalice and asking us to partake of His. . . . He has flung Himself into the current of our affairs to the end of all time in the Blessed Sacrament . . . and He thinks Himself well repaid if we only care.

Self-Knowledge

These things that come home to us and hurt our self-love and humble us in the dust, these are some of God's best graces, full, *full* of promise, and never think that you are at the end of them. There will come more revelations ever more humbling, ever more intimate and ever more true. But never let them cast you down. Remember that they are birthdays, the putting away of the things of a child. . . .

It is a great grace to see in yourself more vanity in speech and act, than you could see before, more to correct in your relations with others. All that is good and a real grace, showing that Our Lord's views and desires and judgments are taking possession of *yours* and conforming them to His own. The great thing is that you should be more and more one with Him. And since it is His ardent

wish, and your own deepest longing, then it *must* and will be.

In Face of Faults

You must not take a failure so much to heart as that. . . . You must cultivate . . . hopeful courage in God's service, and remember all our life there must be falls and failures from time to time to keep us steeped in humility and contrition, so "off again, on again, away again."

Yes, it is extraordinary, as you say, what an amount of self there is to give to God ; but that is a hopeful and joyful thing, because God understands it so well as the gift comes in, bit by bit, sometimes almost against our will. Yet He accepts it, every detail, as we take a crushed and sucked flower from a small child. It means something to us, and it means a great deal to Him who knows and loves us. . . .

. . . Working and fighting are good, they are the law of our life, of any life that is worth living and, do you know, I believe that small reverses in our warfare from time to time do us no harm. Perhaps if we had

an unbroken series of victories we should get proud of ourselves. Never mind if you do not see or measure your own progress, every effort means progress, and your will is certainly gaining, and the grace of God growing in your soul. Don't expect either that you will not feel the deep depressions and high elations that belong to your nature, if you can manage not to be swept off your feet by them and to keep them in hand so far as not to show them, these are *great* victories.

I was quite sure that when you had time to think and put yourself face to face with the Blessed Sacrament, other thoughts would come, and would make you hate the pride and self-will and spirit of criticism, and human views which swept over you, and make you more in love with submission and obedience and self-renunciation and all that takes off the crest and war-paint of our little personalities. One act of humility and giving-in is a pearl in Our Lord's eyes, by the side of which the spirit of hardness to self and endurance of pain . . . are mere tinsel. Give Him the real, the best in everything—those hidden things, of which no one knows the cost but you and He.

It is all good, my dear child, it shows how utterly you must count on God, how slippery and treacherous are our best resolutions. Be true and try to be quiet in the Retreat. The Good Shepherd will come by and pick up the lamb straying again. Nestle up to Him to love and to be loved.

Mark the small fault and the greater recovery as a distinct milestone on the way. These things mean a great deal more of self-knowledge and more self-distrust, and a greater understanding that God is all we want and the only one who can satisfy us. You are quite right in saying that you are freer and

“ Welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough.”

May Our Lord bless and love you more and more.

See how God helps when we need it ! The Quarant’ore came just at the right time and has sent you on your way again, singing in your heart, I hope, and with the steadiness which a fault sorrowed over gives to our purposes, when we know that the fault is

forgiven in Heaven and on earth, and we are determined to repair. The spirit of reparation is one I advise you to pray for. It is so sweet, so humble and so *strong*.

I am sure that God helps us if we help ourselves, and weak as we are, we can do tiny, hidden acts of mortification and fidelity and generosity and so coax Him to help us to kill the bigger vipers that are too big for us. . . . He will work wonders for us if necessary, but, for our faults, He will help us to conquer them by degrees. . . . Often make deep acts of humility before Him, not for anything in particular, but in general, and you will see what peace and strength it gives.

Just a line . . . to tell you that you were quite mistaken in thinking that I was displeased. How should one be, at a chance upset in a life that is seriously tending to God? We all blunder and trip and crawl and tumble and pick ourselves up again. But we are going on, and please God each mistake we make leaves us a little humbler and so nearer to God.

Contrition

Down in the foundation, in the Purgative way, in the First week, the Penitential Psalms, the great salt sea of contrition, one is so safe and blest ; and there the soul can grow hardy, and wait God's time ; and, if He ever means to make a real saint of it there is no time lost, no illusions to disperse, nothing to undo. Whereas dreaming of great sanctity, and expecting the great day at which the soul will assist in white tunic and golden girdle at its own transformation ; or to picture the " doing good to souls " whether with the trumpet or drum, or the whisper of private direction, all this is nothing.

Passing soon and little worth
Are the things that tempt on earth ;
Heavenward lift thy soul's regard,
God Himself is thy reward.

I don't remember where that comes, but it is true.

Mortification

" There is no higher way above nor safer way below, but the way of the Cross and of daily mortification," and that does not mean

principally the exterior mortifications which are more showy and much easier, but the things which do not show at all, tiny renunciations of wishes and inclinations, patience and gentleness and evenness when you feel impatient, steady unselfishness in act. Never let your moods of depression weigh on other people, by making you less kind or bright ; offer the difficult victory (for it is difficult, even if it is a tiny thing like a smile) to Our Lord as a little private proof of love between you and Him, and as a pledge that you would do more if you could. He will understand.

Bodily mortification has an horizon a good deal wider than the discipline, etc. ; I believe that the most happy hunting-ground for mortification is that of half-way faculties, partly body and partly spirit, memory and imagination. They have a daily death laid out for them by those who want to have interior life, *beati mortui qui in Domino moriuntur*.*

Could you have believed that so faithful and valued a partner in *our firm* would have

* Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.—
Apoc. xiv. 13.

such an attack of absent-mindedness? Perhaps you could, as you are suffering from that same infirmity yourself at present. But you must not let it grow upon you. You must oblige yourself to be on the alert and to turn your attention quickly and *entirely* from one thing to another. There is a great deal of mortification in this, and if the things are interesting in themselves, it is as good as a hair-shirt.

The Cross of Bad Health

Yes, it is quite true, although it seems as if your life was checked on every side, by the question of health, yet it is not so. It means a concentration on Heavenly things, not forced, not by application, but in the sense that when something is taken away all the rest grows keener and clearer. God will always be with you, your own God, the light of your soul, and the light of your life. Trust it all to Him. I repeat that you are on the right way now, and though I feel for you more intensely than I can say, yet, I tell you again that I am not afraid for you. And you must remember that hard as it is,

it is the better part. You cannot see it yet, but try to believe it. One day it will be clear. May God bless you and anchor your heart and soul more and more in Himself.

I ask Our Lord to grant you to understand something of the greatness and intimate privilege of your present life of apparent inaction and often of great weariness and renunciation. God wants to be everything to you Himself, and so He takes other things away, but if He means to be *all*, how little is everything else.

The life of a soul is so great a thing, that one of those *distilled* acts of faith and acceptance, without any light or feeling, is of greater activity, and of greater vitality in His sight than the tramp of armies and the power of those that command them.

God is really all and everything else is nothing, and when you submit to Him and resign yourself to Him and lovingly kiss the hand that holds you, then you become one with the *All*; the great Power, Wisdom and Love that is God. . . .

. . . How much I have entered into your feelings, and into each day's offering as you

make it to God. He knows best what is good for us and if He seems to close the avenues through which you would willingly have gone, devoting yourself to His service, it can only be to give you what is much better, a shorter way to Him and a more excellent way than any which one could have dreamed for you, or you for yourself. He, bringing home to you, whether you feel it or not, that He Himself is more than His gifts, and that to love Him is more than to serve Him, that to be submissive to Him is the greatest of all worship. So try to do the one thing worth doing, abandon yourself to His care and His love, and let Him love you in His own way, and try to agree with all that He does, that is best.

Other People's Views

Try not to bother your head about what other people do or love or like or say. Keep to the likeness of Our Lord, as you find it in the Gospels, and remember that in our ignorant and incomplete condition sometimes the more we analyse, the less we see. We are in the caterpillar stage, don't fret

about it. We shall be dragonflies or butterflies some day ! Let us be patient and hold on to prayer. "Thou who hast created me, have mercy on me."

It seems to me that you so often make difficulties for yourself by falling foul of people's personal views and devotions, which you are not called upon to share. Why spend so much time and feeling upon them ? Leave them alone if they do not appeal to you, and do not fight with these devotions as if they were . . . Catholic belief. They are not, they are accessories. You are not called to love God in any particular way, only in the way that suits you best. If you look at the Church's quiet prayers in the Liturgy, you will not find anything to shock you in them . . . Your turn for argument makes more difficulties than there need be. Remember there is no one in the opposition ! Father Daignault would say "Love God and go ahead," being as kind in judgment of others as you would wish them to be tolerant of you.

I have meant to write to you every day. Do you know that, with you, every point of view tends to expand into a creed ! I have

only a little word of advice to offer. Pray don't theorize more than you can possibly help, and especially do not build up card-houses of other people's real or supposed opinions, and then knock them down. Don't be internally controversial!

Do not trouble yourself about what other people do, even the holiest, in their intercourse with Our Lord. I do not think that imaginative realism would suit you at all. Dust and ashes are better. In these you will not stir from the side of truth, and if God wants anything else He will let you know. *Vias tuas Domine, demonstra mihi, et semitas tuas edoce nos.** Keep fast hold of eternal things, let go the things of time. . . .

Value of Little Things

Yes, I believe you will find more and more that surrender in daily life is the solution of the great problem, "How is my soul to get to God?" We are so earthly minded in our measurements that we are a long time before

* Show, O Lord, thy ways to me and teach me thy paths.—Psalm xxiv. 4.

we stop looking for something great, yet see God's choice of means to His great ends, the matter of the Sacraments, the trivial apparent chances of word or act that make a hinge and turn the direction of whole lives. We must train ourselves to see that great side, or at least believe in it firmly and set great store by little things that are so much more than symbols. Pray: *ut mentes nostras ad cœlestia desideria erigas, Te rogamus, audi nos.** . . . Live in the simple thought of God, i.e., the Presence of God, for it is that, and in that you will find all healing, all security, and "rest for your soul."

Good Use of Time

About your time, that is an important matter. I should advise you to *read* when you are in trams and trains. You can get such small, thin, classical literature now, for instance Dent's Everyman Series, that they can be no encumbrance, even to the poor suffering multitude who *have no pockets*. So

* That Thou wouldst lift up our minds to heavenly things : We beseech Thee, hear us.

if you will thus give your odd moments to reading, you will get a fresh and handy knowledge of English classics. Walking in town you cannot read, but you can pray, so let that be God's time. Pray for souls in sorrow, in temptation, for those with vocations, for Bishops, priests, and sometimes let your mind rest quietly in the thought that God is with you, within, around, above you, most intimately with you, and walk, as you would walk, in recollected happiness by the side of Our Lord Himself.

Heaven

. . . We know that the chief joy and blessedness of heaven will be *videbunt faciem ejus*.* All the rest will seem as nothing compared with that. . . . We shall only care for the Gates of Pearl, and the foundation of precious stones and the rainbow of glory of the throne, because of the light of His countenance which shines on them. It is His glory which is the joy of the Holy City. That his work is finished, His

* They shall see his face.—Apoc. xxii. 4.

victory complete, His wounds healed, His wishes accomplished, His Heart loved, His joy full: these will be the subjects of rejoicing, and we shall indeed be blessed in the sight of His glory.

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“There are some things which would be so incongruous on the lips of the saints that the very sound of them should shame us into silence. ‘Not if it’s raining, if you don’t mind: you know how liable I am to chills.’ ‘But that would mean spending the night in the station.’ ‘I think another day in bed—just to be on the safe side.’ Yet we make these frightful remarks on the smallest provocation . . . when perhaps we are missing the chance of relieving another’s mental suffering, when we might be bringing the light of the Gospel to someone who has been nerving himself for weeks to ask us about the Faith . . .”

From the Book

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